

2-17-09

My name is Jenny Stein, and I was born in Ithaca, so like the deer, I am native to this area. I care about what happens in my community, even though an invisible border separates the residents who live in Cayuga Heights from the rest of us who consider Ithaca our home. I have attended all but one of the publicly held deer committee meetings, and there are many questions yet to be answered. Here are just a few:

- How is it determined that there are currently too many deer in the village, when the last count was conducted three years ago?

- If a deer killing program is implemented, how will its success be measured, especially if you don't know how many deer you started with, making it impossible to prove the population was reduced?

- There's an assumption that killing deer on one end of the village will help resolve people's conflicts with deer on the other end of the village. Why has there been no serious consideration given to solving the actual conflicts people are having? After all, isn't it the conflicts that give people the perception there are too many deer?

- I have seen no serious consideration given to compensatory rebound effect, a scientifically documented phenomenon where deer have more twins and reproduce at a younger age when there is a sudden drop in their population. How will it be determined that the killing is actually reducing the population size, and not merely stimulating higher reproduction rates, leading to even more deer the following year?

- Why are the mayor and the deer committee inflating the village's deer-car collision statistics by grouping these numbers, which have specific meaning and are used for yearly comparisons, together with more vaguely defined "incidents"? Even with these inflations, there is no evidence that deer activity has caused a spike in accident rates, despite claims of a spike in their population size. Why would that be?

- Insurance reports have shown that deer-auto collisions are at their highest rates on the first weekend of hunting season. How can you be sure that a bait and shoot program won't also lead to a spike in deer-car collisions from frightened and injured deer scattering into nearby roadways?

- What scientific evidence exists to prove that Lyme disease is currently a threat within the village of Cayuga Heights, or that killing some deer in the village will have any effect on the risk of a resident of the village contracting it?

- If a deer-killing program is approved, how will you guarantee the safety of residents, their pets and their property, and of those who live in adjacent municipalities and people driving through Cayuga Heights, when frangible bullets that miss their targets can still maim and kill, and can still penetrate glass and building walls?

- Why won't the village consider amending its fencing ordinance? Wouldn't it be reasonable to allow residents to install tasteful fencing before the village resorts to something as extreme, controversial, and divisive as a yearly bait and shoot program?

- Why is this decision being rushed to a vote when it will affect our entire community for the next 10 or more years, and there are still so many unanswered questions?

I am concerned that an annual bait and shoot deer killing program in Cayuga Heights will do permanent damage to the non-violent culture of the Ithaca community I so love, as well as put many people and their companion animals at risk -- and not just those who voted for you. A lot of us who didn't will have to endure the negative consequences of your decisions.

Jenny Stein
City of Ithaca